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TESTIMONY OF SARAH EAGAN, ACTING CHILD ADVOCATE FOR  
THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT, REGARDING S.B. 54 AN ACT CONCERNING  
COLLABORATION BETWEEN BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT  
PERSONNEL

February 18, 2014

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, and all distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Sarah Eagan, the Acting Child Advocate for the State of Connecticut and I am submitting this testimony regarding the Senate Bill 54, ***An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and Law Enforcement Personnel***.

The Office of the Child Advocate responds to citizens' calls for help regarding children, often children with disabilities or those who have been victims of abuse or neglect; reports regarding unexplained and unexpected child fatalities; reviews child-serving systems strengths and gaps and partners with stakeholders to develop and implement recommendations for change.

**Many School-Based Arrests are for Non-Violent Offenses**

A detailed compilation of the bases for school-based arrests during the 2011-12 school year concluded that referrals to police were "mandatory" in only 25% of cases (cases involving drugs/weapons, assaults on school staff).<sup>1</sup>

- **342 arrests were for violation of school policies** such as "use of cell phones, cameras ... leaving class without permission ... not attending detention or suspension; shouting; and cheating."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Esty, S., CT Voices for Children Report, *Arresting Development: Student Arrests in Connecticut*, Sept. 2013, pp. 12-15.

<sup>2</sup> Id.

- **156 Children Arrested During the 2011-12 School Year Were in Elementary School.**<sup>3</sup>
- **More than 25 % of school-based arrests in 2011-12 were for children with disabilities.**<sup>4</sup>

### **Black and Hispanic Children are Much More Likely To be Referred to the Juvenile Justice System**

According to an extensive research compilation by CT Voices for Children, “while children of color are overrepresented in detention and custody in nearly every state, those in Connecticut experience some of the highest rates of disproportionality in the country.”<sup>5</sup>

### **The Earlier Children are Referred to the Juvenile Justice System, the Likelier They Will Re-Offend**

We also know that the earlier a child enters the juvenile justice system, whether as a result of a community or school-based offense, the more likely that child is to “re-offend” and return to the justice system.

Diverting children from the juvenile justice is an important public policy that will further educational attainment and reduce criminality. Students who stay connected to school are less likely to use drugs, become pregnant, or attempt suicide.

### **Research Shows Arrests and Other Zero Tolerance Policies in Schools are Ineffective**

Research regarding “zero tolerance” school discipline policies by the American Psychological Association confirms suggests that not only are such policies ineffective but that they can actually be counter-productive as well.<sup>6</sup>

Further, many police officers stationed in school do not receive any formal guidance or protocols from districts regarding how to interact with students and respond to challenges on a day-to-day basis.

### **Senate Bill 54 Will Reduce School-Based Arrests through Use of Evidence-Based Practices**

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<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Id. pg. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Id. pg. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Id. pg. 4 citing American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, “Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools?” *American Psychologist* 63: 9, (December 2008): 852-862, available at: <http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf>

Senate Bill 54 will ensure collaboration between schools and police located within the school through the use of formal memorandums of agreement regarding roles of police stationed in educational programs.

Where these types of agreements between police and schools have been implemented, districts have seen dramatic decrease in inappropriate arrests.

According to Court Support Services Division, “[s]chool based referrals to court continued to drop during the 2012-13 school year with a 52% decline in Hartford and a 32% decline in Bridgeport when compared with the previous school year.”

**Senate Bill 54 Will Ensure Transparency and Accountability Regarding School-Based Arrests**

This bill will ensure that community members are well informed with data regarding school-based arrests. The State Department of Education will collect data on school-based arrests to include in schools’ strategic profile reports and shall make this information publicly accessible through the state-wide public school information system implemented pursuant to section 10-10a. Data sharing is a critical need in the effort to maintain children in school and reduce the school to prison pipeline.

Thank you for reviewing this testimony.

Sincerely,

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How can I find out more information?

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